

Department of Energy Marshall Islands Medical Program Conducted by Brookhaven National Laboratory

The Department of Energy's (DOE) Marshall Islands Medical Program is one of three programs for which Congress provides special Defense appropriations funding. This funding also allows for the execution of environmental monitoring and dose assessment initiatives that are providing the basis for better understanding of residual environmental levels, the potential uptake of radionuclides through the local food chain, and dose assessments that assist the Marshallese having the data at hand to make informed resettlement decisions. Congress appropriates \$6.8 million annually for these three programs.

DOE provides, as part of its effort, medical surveillance and medical care for the current population of about 129 Rongelap and Utirik individuals who received significant fallout dose from Operation Castle's Test Bravo in 1954. Currently this costs about \$2.6 million annually. At the time of the Compact implementation in 1986, Congress specified the medical care for the then 174 remaining Rongelap and Utirik population as a special group needing such medical care. This is a voluntary program but more than 95% of those exposed in a larger initial group of 253 individuals (including 12 in utero) have participated and have received primary, secondary and tertiary care for conditions that are considered to be radiation related. Oversight of the medical aspects of the DOE program are provided by the Office of International Health Programs (EH-63). The day-to-day administration of the medical program and the orchestration of the medical missions to the Marshall Islands are provided by the Brookhaven National Laboratory under contract to DOE. Bechtel Nevada Corporation is the pacific logistics contractor that provides the means of getting medical support personnel and assets to the Marshall Islands for these missions.

Two medical missions are conducted in the RMI each fiscal year. They are split evenly in terms of the length of the mission and the number of patients examined. Discussions between the USG and the RMI Government on how to implement the medical program in the most effective way are ongoing.

The exposed population is considered at risk for malignant disease as a late complication of prior radiation exposure; the Program has implemented a cancer-oriented annual health evaluation. The examination follows the guidelines of the American Cancer Society. Some procedures are performed more frequently than recommended for the general population because of the presumed, increased risk to radiation exposure. The results of examination indicate that the exposed population is at greater risk for developing certain problems such a thyroid disease. Therefore, exposed individuals receive annual thyroid tests and examinations by specialists. In addition to the examination above, the DOE Medical Program also dispenses primary medical care and preventive medical services to the exposed population.

Any exposure person who cannot be treated by physicians participating in a Department of Energy medical mission because of a lack of adequate facilities, is referred to tertiary facilities for a definitive evaluation and for appropriate therapy. The usual referral hospital is the Straub Clinic in Honolulu.

A publication updating the medical findings of the Department of Energy's Marshall Islands Program covering fiscal year 1988 through 1991 has been completed. The Brookhaven National Laboratory staff is also preparing scientific publications on thyroid nodules/cancer, skin cancer, and cataracts, based on data obtained during the Marshall Islands missions.

In response to a request from the RMI Government, all medical records on the living exposed population have been copied in hard-copy and delivered to the RMI Government through the 177 Health Care Program (HCP). In addition, the 177 HCP has been provided, both on microfilm and on CD-ROM, copies of all records of the exposed population both living and deceased up to and including the visits of the Spring 1994 mission.

Moreover, the DOE Marshall Islands Medical Program continues to work closely with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal in the Marshall Islands. In fiscal year 1995, the Brookhaven National Laboratory provided, as needed, medical data requested by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal to assist the RMI in its review of compensation claims.